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SUBJECT: NANGARHAR POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: THE PERSONALITIES

REF: Kabul 175

¶1. (SBU) Nangarhar's political scene is dominated by a handful of individuals. Personal loyalty and tribal affiliations are often more important than competence or qualifications in determining who has influence in the province.

Gul Agha Sherzai - Governor  
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¶2. (SBU) Governor since 2004, Sherzai is the dominant player in Nangarhar politics, often ruling through force of personality. He has aspirations for national leadership and regards himself as a viable presidential candidate. A large man with a commanding presence, he often physically intimidates his rivals. He is a poor listener who always tries to dominate the conversation. A weak administrator, Sherzai represents the epitome of a strong Pashtun leader, balancing tribes and loyalty networks against each other to enhance his position. He generously distributes financial support to different groups -- especially the elders of the province, journalists, parliamentarians, and provincial council members -- to secure their support. He is also the chief elder of the Barakzai tribe in Kandahar, which has a traditionally higher status than President Karzai's Popalzai tribe.

¶3. (SBU) Sherzai approaches governing more as a commander-in-chief than as a governor. Although he formerly was a powerful Mahz-e-Milli commander in southern Afghanistan, party affiliation is a minor component of his power. Nonetheless, his Jihadi credentials are key to his influence. Upon his arrival in Nangarhar, he immediately established his supremacy by challenging the local commanders to stand up to him. He takes full advantage of both his government post and the support of central government figures to extend his control. His main base of Nangarhar support is among the Mohmand tribe, with some support among the Shinwaris. He has the least support among the Khogyanis, primarily because he has dismissed several prominent Khogyanis from government posts since arriving in Nangarhar.

¶4. (SBU) Sherzai also fully exploits financial opportunities available to him as the governor of a province with the major highway linking Kabul and Islamabad. Although most Nangarhar residents recognize that Sherzai illegally collects revenues, they credit him with using at least a portion of that money to reconstruct Nangarhar. In addition, he makes a show of his support for the central government and the Coalition. He cultivates good relations with the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), Coalition commanders, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan

(UNAMA) and the rest of the international community. He sometimes exploits these relationships to his own advantage, threatening his rivals that he can turn the Coalition against them.

Fazal Hadi Muslimyar - Provincial Council Chairman

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15. (SBU) Muslimyar is a young, dynamic leader on the rise. He comes from Chaparhar District in central Nangarhar and is a member of the Dawlatzai Tribe. His relationship with President Karzai is reportedly close and growing closer, and he is rumored to be in line to manage Karzai's reelection campaign in the eastern region. He is the protege of the late Abdul Halim Malingyar, who was a powerful Jihadi commander from southe